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HISTORICAL KASKASKIA

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H I S T O R I C A L

K A S K A S K I A

b y

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HISTORICAL KASKASKIA

Kaskaskia has been the scene of interesting historical events. It has also been the occasion of much confusion and misunderstanding. In speaking of Kaskaskia, one must bear in mind that there were six distinct Kaskaskias; or, perhaps more accurately, the same "Kaskaskia" was to be found, at six different points of time, in six different locations.

The first Kaskaskia was situated on the upper Illinois River, near the spot where the town of Utica, Illinois, now stands (across the Illinois River from "Starved Rock").

The second Kaskaskia (formed by a change of location of the first Kaskaskia) stood some fifty miles farther down the Illinois River, at the southern end of "Lake Peoria", near the present site of Peoria, Illinois.

The third Kaskaskia (which was the second Kaskaskia -- or at least the greater part of it -- moved to a different location) stood at the confluence of the Des Peres River with the Mississippi, at a site which is now on the southern city limits of St. Louis, Missouri.

The fourth Kaskaskia (representing again a transmigration from the third Kaskaskia) was located on the western bank of the Kaskaskia River

about four miles above (north of) its confluence with the Mississippi River, some five or six miles north of the present city of Chester, Illinois.

The fifth Kaskaskia was formed when the Kaskaskia Indians left the fourth Kaskaskia (which, in their opinion, was becoming over-crowded with Frenchmen) and established their village several miles farther up the Kaskaskia River (north of the fourth Kaskaskia). This fifth Kaskaskia was often referred to as Indian Kaskaskia, while the fourth Kaskaskia -- after the departure of the Indians -- became known as French Kaskaskia.

The sixth Kaskaskia was formed when floodwaters (as early as 1835 and 1844, but especially since the great flood of 1881) began to wash away French Kaskaskia. Some of the inhabitants of French Kaskaskia, when driven out by the floodwaters, established themselves several miles to the south; and thus arose the present town of Kaskaskia, which is the sixth Kaskaskia.

The First Kaskaskia, 1673-1691

About the end of May or the beginning of June, 1673, Father Claude Allouez, S.J., left his headquarters at St. Francis Xavier Mission near Green Bay and made the "six days' journey" to Kaskaskia, where a numerous group of Illinois Indians (mostly Kaskaskia Indians, but also some Peoria

Indians and Miamis) had a village on the Illinois River directly across from "Starved Rock". While he was there, a band of Peoria Indians, who had been encamped on the west bank of the Mississippi River (in present Iowa) and there were visited by the Jolliet exploring expedition in the latter part of June, 1673, returned to their former habitat on the Illinois River and there informed Father Allouez that the Jolliet exploring party planned to return to Green Bay by way of the Illinois River.

Father Allouez was not at all interested in the Jolliet expedition, which was a purely civil enterprise, and had managed to avoid meeting the explorers when they passed through the Green Bay area in the latter part of May. He was equally solicitous to avoid meeting them at Kaskaskia, and so he determined to return to his headquarters, St. Francis Xavier Mission near Green Bay, before the Jolliet exploring party would reach Kaskaskia. The length of Father Allouez's stay and activity at Kaskaskia was some eight or ten weeks, from the early part of June to the middle of August, 1673.

For his two months of missionary activity at Kaskaskia, Father Allouez could report worth-while achievements. At the very beginning of his next annual report (covering the period from June, 1673 to June, 1674), Father Allouez testifies: "I have



P. CLAUDE ALLOUEZ, S.J.
founder of the
KASKASKIA MISSION
June, 1673

already visited the Caskakias [Kaskaskia Indians] and have baptized many of their children; I have borne the first words of the Faith to the Peoualeas [Peoria Indians] who dwell among the Miamis, and they have listened to me with much docility."

The old claim that Jacques Marquette, S.J., founded the Kaskaskia Mission and was the first to say Holy Mass there in April, 1675, is completely at variance with the above-quoted testimony of Father Allouez. It was Father Claude Allouez, S.J., who first visited Kaskaskia in June, 1673; and inasmuch as he remained there for about two months -- long enough to "baptize many of their children" and to win the confidence and good will of the Peoria Indians to such an extent that "they have listened to me with much docility" -- it can be safely assumed that he also said the first Holy Mass at Kaskaskia some time in June, 1673.

Shortly after Father Allouez's departure, the Jolliet exploring expedition reached Kaskaskia in late August or early September and they tarried there for three days.

In 1677, Father Allouez was officially put in charge of the Kaskaskia Mission, and he remained active in this general area (Kaskaskias, Peorias, Miamis) for the next twelve years until his death among the Miamis in 1689. It was during Father Allouez's administration of the Kaskaskia

Mission that La Salle and Tonti erected (1682-83) Fort St. Louis atop Starved Rock. Father Allouez was succeeded in 1689 by an equally zealous and energetic missionary, Father Jacques Gravier, S.J.

The Second Kaskaskia, 1691-1700

After La Salle's death, Henri de Tonti was placed in charge of Fort St. Louis. Since the Illinois Indians had previously manifested a desire to abandon their village near Starved Rock "because the fire-wood was remote and because it was so difficult to get water upon the Rock if they were attacked", Tonti inquired whether they still had plans to move the village and where they intended to establish themselves. The Indians chose to move some fifty miles down the Illinois River, to Lake Pimitoui, later also known as Lake Peoria. This area had already for many years been their winter hunting grounds.

Tonti promptly cooperated with this plan. He arrived at Lake Pimitoui in the winter of 1691 and at once began building a fort to which the Indians might repair for protection in case of a hostile invasion. The fort, sometimes called Fort St. Louis but more frequently named Fort Pimitoui, was completed in 1692, and it was garrisoned by a large number of French soldiers. Around the fort a French settlement soon sprang up. The popula-



STARVED ROCK
overlooking
the site of the
FIRST KASKASKIA

tion of the Indian village appears to have been about four or five thousand.

Father Pierre François Charlevoix, S.J., has left us a vivid description of this location. He writes as follows:

"The third of October about noon we found ourselves at the entrance of the Lake Pimitoui; it is the river which grows wider here, and which for three leagues is one league in breadth. At the end of these three leagues, we find on the right a second village of the Illinois, distant about fifteen leagues from that of the Rock. Nothing can be more pleasant than its situation; it has over against it, as in perspective, a very fine forest, which was then of all colors, and behind it a plain of immense extent, bordered with woods. The lake and the river swarm with fish, and their sides with wild-fowl."

When Father Charlevoix visited this village in 1721, the "Illinois" dwelling there were the Peoria Indians; for the Kaskaskia Indians had left this area about twenty-one years before. Father Charlevoix's description tallies with Father Mermet's reference to the Peoria Indians as "Illinois de Detroit" ("Illinois of the Narrows"), because their village was located near the place where the Illinois River, after having for a distance of

about eight miles expanded to a width of over two miles to form Lake Peoria, again "narrowed" down to its normal width.

Father Gravier employs the same designation repeatedly in his letter of February 16, 1701:

"I arrived too late among the Illinois of the Narrows, of whom Father Marest has charge, to prevent the migration of the Village of the Kaskaskia. . . . I do not think that the Kaskaskia would have separated from the Peoria and from the other Illinois of the Narrows, if I could have arrived sooner. . . . May God grant that the road from Chikagoua to the Narrows be not closed, and that the entire Illinois Mission may not suffer greatly thereby."

The Sieur de Liettes, who lived at Fort Pimitoui for seven years, describes the daily routine of the missionaries:

"Every day, as soon as the sun rises, they go about among the cabins to find out if anyone is sick; they give them medicines, and if necessary bleed them, and sometimes even they make broth for them. After which they have it cried through the village that they are about to say Mass. Then they teach the catechism or they preach sermons. In the afternoon, after having applied themselves to the language, they return to the village to teach the catechism, which

always takes two hours. The pieces of wood, husks of Indian corn, and even stones which are thrown at them do not dismay them; they continue their cries, contenting themselves with saying that it is the Master of life who orders them to do what they are doing, and that those who wish to listen to His word may follow while those who do not wish to hear it may stay away. In the evening they come again to call to prayer, which is followed by a prayer-service for the French. No weather prevents them from going through with the same exercises. Sometimes they are sent for at night to come to the edge of the village, which is more than an eighth of a league long, to assist the dying."

The missionaries active at the Peoria village during this period (1691-1700) were the Jesuit Fathers Jacques Gravier, Sebastien Rasle, Julien Bineteau, and Gabriel Marest. Father Gravier was in charge of the Peoria, or "second Kaskaskia" mission from 1691 till 1696. For about a year (1692-1693) he was assisted by Father Rasle. When Father Gravier was named Superior of all the Ottawa missions in 1696, Father Bineteau took charge of the Peoria mission. He was joined, two years later, in 1698, by Father Marest. When his three-year (1696-1699) term as Superior of all the Ottawa missions had expired, Father Gravier returned

to the Peoria mission, arriving there when the Kaskaskia Indians were already on the point of setting out for Louisiana.

The Third Kaskaskia, 1700-1703

In the spring of 1699, Le Moyne d'Iberville, commanding two hundred soldiers and colonists, occupied the southernmost reaches of the Mississippi River and laid the foundation of what became known as Louisiana. About the same time, on the Illinois River, it was rumored that the Kaskaskia Indians were planning to abandon their village at Lake Peoria and to join the Iberville forces in Louisiana. In Illinois the Indians were fearing an invasion by the warlike Fox Indians, while from the East the Iroquois were a constant threat.

In September, 1700, the Kaskaskia Indians, numbering about twelve hundred souls, followed their Chief, Rouensa by name and an exemplary Christian, ostensibly for Louisiana. The migrating tribe was accompanied by Father Gravier and Father Marest. When they reached Tamaroa, on the eastern bank of the Mississippi River, directly across from the site of the present city of St. Louis, Missouri, the influence of Father Gravier produced a halt in the southward migration of the Kaskaskia Indians.

On reaching Tamaroa, Father Marest fell ill. Father Jean Bergier, a priest of the Quebec Seminary of Foreign Missions who was then in charge of the Tamaroa Mission, cordially invited Father Marest to remain at the Mission until he recovered sufficiently to proceed on his journey to the South. So Father Marest remained at Tamaroa and enjoyed the hospitality of Father Bergier, while Father Gravier left for Louisiana to meet and consult with d'Iberville.

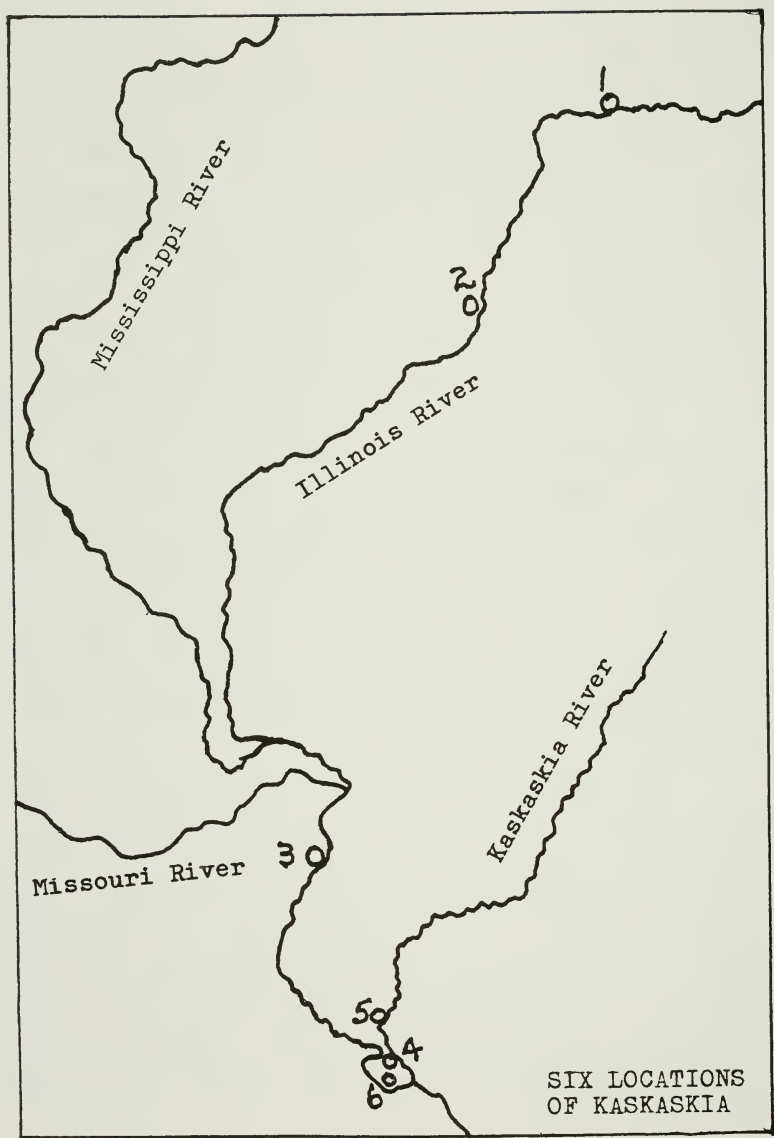
When the Kaskaskia Indians reached Tamaroa, they found assembled there, in addition to a group of French settlers and traders, three different tribes of the Illinois confederacy -- all told, perhaps some two thousand souls. The three tribes were the Tamaroas, the Cahokias, and the Metchigamias, the village of the last-named tribe being located about fifty miles farther south on the Metchigamia (eventually to be known as the Kaskaskia) River.

It may have been the large assembly of Indians at Tamaroa that prompted Rouensa, the Chief of the Kaskaskia Indians, to have the twelve hundred Indians comprising his tribe cross the Mississippi River and establish themselves, about five miles farther south, on the north bank of the Des Peres River, near where it empties into the Mississippi River. The site they occupied is to-

day at the southern city limits of St. Louis, Missouri.

Chief Rouensa moved his Indians to the west bank of the Mississippi River undoubtedly with the knowledge and approval of Father Gravier who, as is evident from what eventually ensued, had no intention of settling the Kaskaskia Indians, jointly with d'Iberville's plan, at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Attracted and invited by Rouensa, the majority of the Tamaroa Indians soon joined the Kaskaskias on the Des Peres River. Thus, after the Metchigamias returned to their village fifty miles to the south, Father Bergier was left alone with the Cahokia Indians at Tamaroa. It was probably due to this circumstance that the area on the east side of the Mississippi River opposite the present city of St. Louis, which had hitherto been known as Tamaroa, was subsequently called Cahokia.

The Kaskaskia Indians remained at the Des Peres River about two and a half years. During this time three Jesuit missionaries labored there. They were Fathers Gabriel Marest, Jean Baurie, and François Pinet. Twice during this time the Jesuits at the Des Peres River contemplated penetrating into the interior, notably the Sioux country, by way of the Missouri River. However, both attempts came to naught.



It was apparently at the close of the year 1701 that Father Baurie set out on a missionary expedition to the habitat of the Sioux Indians. He had proceeded fifty miles up the Missouri River when for some reason the expedition was wrecked and Father Baurie was compelled to return to the Des Peres River. In 1702, Father Baurie returned to France.

On July 5, 1702, Father Pinet, who had been working with Father Bergier at Tamaroa, left Tamaroa and crossed the Mississippi River in order to take charge of the Kaskaskia and Tamaroa Indians at the Des Peres River and thus release Father Marest, who was planning to make a missionary trip to the Sioux country. But sudden death on August 1, 1702, took away Father Pinet and left Father Marest in sole charge of the Mission at the Des Peres River.

The Fourth Kaskaskia, 1703-1719

In the spring of 1703, Chief Rouensa with his Kaskaskia Indians and the Tamaroa Indians who had joined them, left their habitat at the mouth of the Des Peres River and migrated about sixty miles south, where they established their village on the west bank of the Metchigamia (now Kaskaskia) River, about four miles above its confluence with the Mississippi, -- at a point where the

Metchigamia River at that time approached to within about two miles of the Mississippi River. This event is duly recorded in the Baptismal Register of the Kaskaskia Mission. Immediately following the baptismal entry for April 13, 1703, there is inscribed this statement: "On April 25, 1703, we arrived on the bank of the river called Metchigamia" ("Ad ripam Metchigamia dictam venimus").

The reason for this migration is not expressly indicated, but it can easily be inferred. Father Bergier, Pastor of Cahokia, in a letter dated July 3, 1703, wrote: "All the French who were here, afraid of being killed or plundered [by the Sioux Indians], are abandoning the village [Cahokia] and going some to Pere Maretz's [Marest's] mission twenty-five leagues lower down the River of the Metchigamias, others to the Ouabache [Ohio] with a view to safety." Father Bergier's mention of the Ouabache or Ohio River has reference to the French settlement established in 1702 by Charles Juchereau on the Ohio River about five miles above its mouth. Two years later, in 1704, an epidemic ravaged the settlement and carried off many of the settlers, including Charles Juchereau himself. Thereupon the settlement was abandoned, most of the survivors going to Mobile. Father Jean Mermet, S.J., who had been the Chaplain of Juchereau's settlement on the Ohio River, returned

to Kaskaskia.

If the French settlers at Cahokia migrated towards the south for fear of "being killed or plundered" by the Sioux Indians, it appears reasonable to assume that the Kaskaskia Indians migrated out of the same motive. The Kaskaskia Indians were a peace-loving tribe who were ever ready to forsake their habitat and seek a place of security elsewhere, whenever any hostile tribe threatened to attack them. It had been the threat of a hostile invasion by the Fox Indians that induced the Kaskaskias to abandon their village at Lake Peoria in 1700; it was very likely the danger of attack by the Sioux Indians that impelled them in 1703 to abandon their village on the Des Peres River.

It should also be noted that Father Marest and the Kaskaskia Indians met some of the Metchigamia Indians at Tamaroa-Cahokia in 1700. Perhaps already at that time the Metchigamia Indians extended to them an invitation to come and settle near their village on the Metchigamia River.

The sixteen-year period from 1703 to 1719 marked the golden age of the Kaskaskia Mission. The missionaries active at Kaskaskia during this period were:

1) Father Gabriel Marest, S.J., who came with the Kaskaskia Indians when they migrated from the

Des Peres River to the Kaskaskia River. He remained at Kaskaskia till his death in 1714.

2) Father Jean Mermet, S.J., who accompanied the Charles Juchereau expedition to the Ohio River in 1702 and remained there till the abandonment of that post in 1704. Thereupon he came to Kaskaskia and remained there till his death in 1716.

3) Father Jean Marie de Ville, S.J., who was assigned to the Illinois Mission in 1707 but found his passage blocked at the time and did not reach his destination until about 1711. Shortly after reaching Kaskaskia he was sent to the Peoria mission for two years, 1712-1714. He returned to Kaskaskia in 1714 and remained there till 1719, when he journeyed to Mobile to consult with Governor Bienville. He never returned to Kaskaskia, but died the following year, June 15, 1720, at Natchez.

Christianity was in a flourishing condition at Kaskaskia. Father Gravier, in a letter dated March 6, 1707, testified that of the total population of 2200, only forty or fifty were not Christians. Many of the Frenchmen (some of them from Cahokia) who settled at Kaskaskia married Indian women, as is evident from the entries in the Baptismal Register of that time. For of the infants that were baptized between the years 1701 and 1713, eighty per cent are recorded as having a

French father and an Indian mother.

There was a large church in the village, where most of the Indians gathered three times every day: in the morning for Holy Mass, in the afternoon for Catechism instruction, in the evening for prayers and hymns. In between these church services, the missionaries would make their daily rounds of the village, visiting the sick and consoling the sorrowing. On Sundays there was High Mass in the morning, and in the afternoon Vespers, at which the French chanted in Latin and the Indians responded in Illinois.

But even during this golden age, Kaskaskia was not free of all troubles. While the resident French lived in peace and harmony with the Indians, freely intermarrying with them, the French traders from Canada were a frequent source of disturbance. By their life of debauchery they were a grave scandal to the Christians, and they caused frequent disorders by inciting the Indian tribes to war upon each other in order thus to secure slaves to sell to the English. Several times (in 1708, 1711, 1719) the missionary had to appeal to Governor Bienville for military intervention to quell the irregularities of these French-Canadian traders.

The most tragic period was the summer of 1714, when a very ravaging epidemic carried away

several hundred persons, among them the missionary in charge, Father Gabriel Marest, S.J., who died on September 15, 1714. Father Mermet then took charge of the Kaskaskia mission for the next two years, but he also died, on September 15, 1716. Thereupon Father Ville was in charge till 1719.

The Fifth Kaskaskia, 1719-1795

In 1718 the energetic Pierre Boisbriant became the Commandant of the Illinois country. In December, 1718, he arrived at Kaskaskia (from New Orleans) with a flotilla of ten canoes carrying army officers, government officials, working-men, and a hundred soldiers.

To protect the country against attacks by hostile Indians or by the Spaniards, he resolved to erect a fort on the east bank of the Mississippi River some sixteen miles north of Kaskaskia. About two years (1719-1721) were required to complete this fort, which was then named Fort Chartres. While the fort was under construction, the army officers and soldiers were lodged in the town of Kaskaskia.

Partly on account of this crowded condition and partly due to Boisbriant's plan to separate the Indians from the French, the Kaskaskia Indians withdrew from the town, migrated some five miles towards the north and there established themselves

on the west bank of the Kaskaskia River. This Indian settlement became the fifth Kaskaskia, and it is often referred to as Indian Kaskaskia to distinguish it from French Kaskaskia, as the fourth Kaskaskia was called after the departure of the Indians.

Although there is no direct testimony to this effect, the Jesuits must have erected -- at their own expense -- a church in this Indian Kaskaskia; for in 1726 they asked the Commandant to reimburse them for the expenses they had incurred in building this church. For over forty years this Indian settlement flourished under the care of the Jesuit missionaries. When in 1763 the Jesuits were expelled from the country, Father Sebastien Meurin, S.J., who for the past twenty years had ministered to these Indians, was also forced to leave.

But before he sailed from New Orleans, the urgent appeal of the Indians prevailed upon the civil authorities to permit Father Meurin to return to the Illinois country; -- a permission which the civil authorities conceded only with the provision that henceforth he would function as a diocesan priest, and not as a Jesuit. And so Father Meurin returned to the Illinois country for the remaining thirteen years of his life. He was stationed successively at Ste. Genevieve (1764-

1767), Cahokia (1767-1768), and Prairie du Rocher (1768-1777). While at the last-named place, Father Meurin was only a short distance from his beloved Indians of Kaskaskia.

How long Indian Kaskaskia continued to exist after the death of Father Meurin in 1777, it is difficult to determine. In 1795, when Father Pierre Janin was sent by Bishop Carroll to take charge of Kaskaskia (that is, French Kaskaskia), there was still an Indian mission attached to this Parish. This Indian mission was very likely Indian Kaskaskia. But soon after this date the Kaskaskia Indians seem to have begun drifting westward, for around the year 1835 we find a remnant of them on the Osage River in western Missouri.

French Kaskaskia, 1719-1894

After the Kaskaskia Indians had departed in 1719 to establish their own village about five miles farther north, French Kaskaskia (which is merely a continuation of the fourth Kaskaskia) became a French parish. This change in ecclesiastical status is noted in the Baptismal Register, which in 1719 entered a new title heading: "Register of Baptisms performed in the Church of the Mission and in the Parish of the Conception." ("Registre des Baptêmes faits dans l'église de la Mission et dans la Paroisse de la Conception").

With the advent of government officials, military leaders, and wealthy merchants, there began at French Kaskaskia a social life that strove to rival, on a modest scale, the gay life of the royal court at Versailles. In fact, during the middle of the eighteenth century, French Kaskaskia is sometimes referred to as the "Versailles of the West". The town became so well known not only in America but also in France, that it captured the fancy of the King of France, Louis XV, who in the year 1741 presented Kaskaskia with a church-bell which is still preserved today.

This bell was cast by Normand in the seaport town of La Rochelle in France in 1741. It weighs 600 pounds and bears the inscription: "Pour l'église des Illinois par les soins du roi d'outre-leau." ("For the Church of the Illinois, with the compliments of the King from beyond the sea"). This bell was in use until the year 1873. Then new bells (cast in St. Louis) were procured and the old French bell was stored away in an old building which later crumbled under the impact of the flood-waters of the Mississippi River. The bell was recovered in 1918 and brought to New Kaskaskia. In 1948 the State of Illinois erected a shrine (a beautiful brick structure) which now houses this "Liberty Bell of the West".



THE LIBERTY BELL OF THE WEST



HISTORICAL SHRINE HOUSING

THE KASKASKIA BELL

It was this French Kaskaskia that George Rogers Clark captured for the Americans during the Revolutionary War. Father Pierre Gibault was Pastor of Kaskaskia at that time. As a matter of fact, Father Gibault had charge of the entire Illinois mission, including Kaskaskia, Ste. Genevieve, Prairie du Rocher, Cahokia, and Vincennes; but at the time of Clark's expedition (1778) his headquarters were at Kaskaskia. The French inhabitants of Kaskaskia were at first very much dejected at finding their town in the control of the Americans. But when Colonel Clark permitted Father Gibault to continue conducting church services as usual and assured the Kaskaskians that their property was secured to them and that their liberty would be guaranteed and defended by the Americans, and moreover that France had espoused the cause of the Americans, -- then the outburst of joy and enthusiasm for the Americans knew no bounds.

In response to this magnanimous treatment by Colonel Clark, Father Gibault and Jean Baptiste Laffont, a prominent citizen of Kaskaskia, went to Vincennes in order to win the French populace of that town over to the American cause. When the people of Vincennes learned of the occurrences at Kaskaskia and heard of the proclamation of Colonel Clark, they promptly espoused the American cause.

It was this same French Kaskaskia that became the first State Capital of Illinois in 1818. But when the seat of government was removed to Vandalia in 1819, the importance of Kaskaskia began to decline rapidly.

French Kaskaskia or Old Kaskaskia (1703-1894) had, successively, four churches:

The first church was built of logs, covered with straw; it was erected at the very beginning of the settlement on the bank of the Kaskaskia River in the year 1703.

The second church was built of stone and was remarkable for its grandeur and its proportions; it was built in 1740 at the expense of the French government and was used for divine services till the year 1775.

The third church was built of timbers set perpendicular (wherefore a certain writer described it as "a monument of posts"); it was erected by the people in 1775, but pulled down in 1838 on account of its weather-beaten condition.

The fourth church was built of brick in 1838 and stood until 1894. Then, as the flood-waters began to threaten (ever since 1881), this church was dismantled and the materials were used to erect a new church several miles to the south (at the site of New Kaskaskia). The last-named church is still in use today.



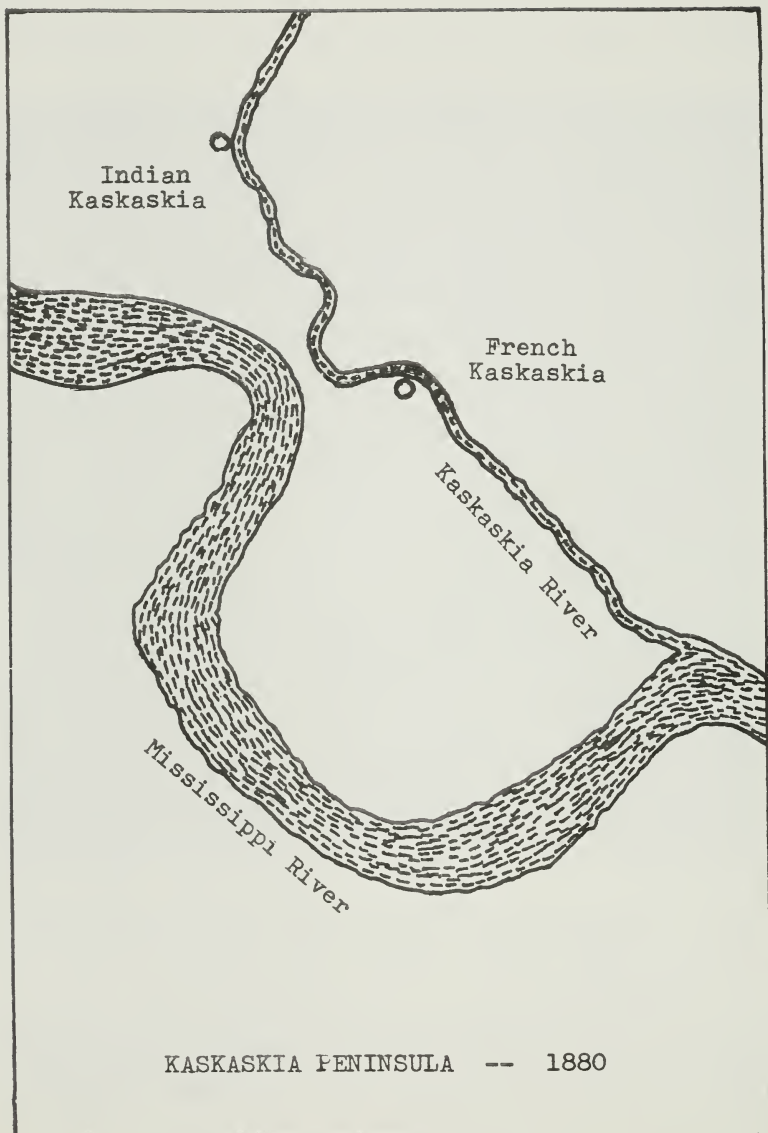
CHURCH OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
built at the present (the Sixth)
KASKASKIA in the year 1894

The Sixth Kaskaskia, 1894-present

When the fourth Kaskaskia was established in 1703 on the west bank of the Kaskaskia River, the Mississippi River lay about two miles to the west. But the intervening land was alluvial soil which the mighty Mississippi continued to erode year by year, especially whenever it rose to flood-stage. By the year 1881 the strip of land separating the Mississippi and the Kaskaskia River just above the town of Kaskaskia had been narrowed to about four hundred feet.

Then during the great flood of April, 1881, the break-through occurred. The Mississippi began to feed its mighty current into the Kaskaskia River just north of French Kaskaskia. The narrow bed of the Kaskaskia River was of course not capable of carrying the voluminous stream of the mighty Mississippi. Unfortunately for French Kaskaskia, the eastern bank of the Kaskaskia River at this point is a cliff of solid rock. Hence the additional river-bed needed had to be carved out by washing away the western bank of the Kaskaskia River, -- the bank on which the town of Kaskaskia was situated.

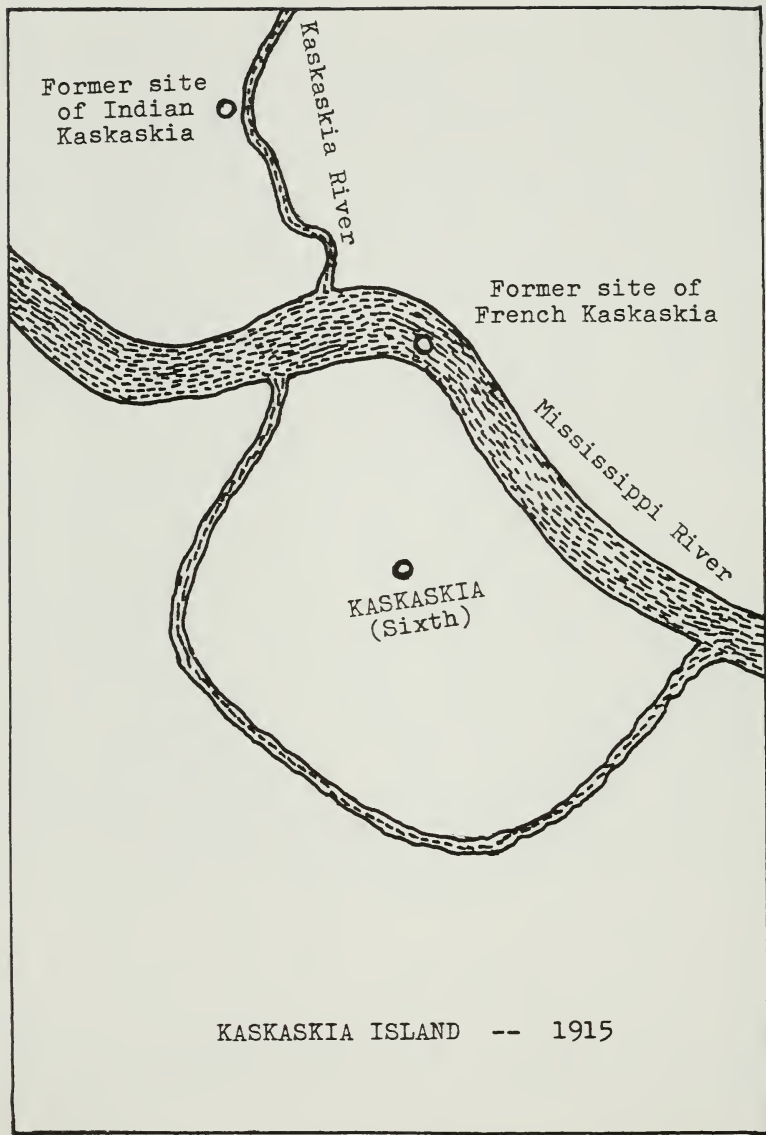
French Kaskaskia had repeatedly suffered from floods. Thus in 1844 the flood-waters stood eight feet deep in the streets of the town. However,



these were merely back-waters, caused by the inability of the Kaskaskia River to disgorge its waters into the Mississippi (some five or six miles below) when the latter was at flood-stage. These back-waters had very little flow or current, and receded gradually as the flood-stage passed. But now the town was brought into the path of the main current of the Mississippi River. French Kaskaskia was now inevitably doomed to gradual but complete destruction, within the next few decades, by the ravaging waters of the Mississippi River.

As the inhabitants of French Kaskaskia had to yield, year by year, to the inexorable force of the ever-encroaching might of the Mississippi River, many of them withdrew some two miles towards the south, where they established the sixth Kaskaskia, which is the present town of Kaskaskia, situated nearly in the center of Kaskaskia Island. Kaskaskia Island is about five miles square, containing some 14,000 acres of rich alluvial soil. It lies west of the Mississippi River, but it continues to belong to the State of Illinois.

* * * * *



Short Life-sketches of
Priests active in Kaskaskia
1 6 7 3 -- 1 8 3 5

From 1673 to 1835, over forty priests were active at Kaskaskia. Some of these were the missionary in charge or, at a later period, the Pastor of the parish; others were not assigned to Kaskaskia, but lent a helping hand whenever needed by administering the sacraments (their signature appears in the Baptismal or Marriage Register).

1. Claude Jean Allouez, S.J.

Father Claude Allouez was born at St. Didier, France, in 1613; he entered the Jesuit Order on September 25, 1642, and came to Canada on July 11, 1658. He founded the first mission in Wisconsin, Mission St. Esprit (near the present site of Ashland) in 1665; also the second mission, St. Francis Xavier Mission (near the present site of De Pere) in 1669; likewise the first mission in Illinois, Kaskaskia (at the present site of Utica) in the late spring of 1673. He is therefore justly styled the Apostle of Wisconsin and of Illinois. From 1677 to 1688 he had charge of the Kaskaskia mission. He died among the Miami Indians of St. Joseph River (near the present site of Niles, Michigan), on August 27, 1689.

2. Jean Baptiste Aubert, S.J.

Father Jean Baptiste Aubert was born in France on March 1, 1722; he entered the Jesuit Order on September 7, 1739, and came to Louisiana in 1754. For five years he was active "among various Indian tribes". Thereupon he acted as Pastor of Kaskaskia from 1759 to 1763. When the Jesuits were expelled from Louisiana, Father Aubert returned to France in 1764 and was still active there twenty years later, in 1784. When he died is not known.

3. Jean Baurie, S.J.

Father Jean Baurie was born in France, but the date of his birth is not known; nor is it known when he entered the Jesuit Order. He arrived in Canada in 1699 and apparently was assigned immediately to the Illinois mission, for in 1701 we find him at the Kaskaskia mission on the Des Peres River. He started on a missionary expedition to the Sioux Indians, but the expedition (after proceeding only fifty miles up the Missouri River) was wrecked, and Father Baurie returned to the Des Peres River. The following year, 1702, he proceeded down the Mississippi and thence returned to France. The date of his death is not known.

4. Nicolas Ignace de Beaubois, S.J.

Father Nicolas de Beaubois was born at Orleans in France on October 15, 1689; he entered the Jesuit Order on October 29, 1706, and arrived in Canada in 1718. He was at Kaskaskia from 1720 to 1726. Then he went to France to recruit missionaries. In 1727 he returned to Louisiana (New Orleans) with seven other priests. He was Superior of the Louisiana missions for three years, 1727-1730, and Director of the Ursulines in New Orleans till 1735, when he was recalled to France. From 1752 to 1762 he is listed as "Director of Retreats" at Vannes, France. The date he died is not recorded.

5. Julien Bineteau, S.J.

Father Julien Bineteau was born at La Flèche in France on May 12, 1660; he entered the Jesuit Order on September 7, 1676, and came to Canada in 1691. Five years later, in 1696, he was sent to the Kaskaskia mission (then located at Peoria). In May, 1699, he accompanied the Seminary Priest François de Montigny from Peoria to the Tamaroa mission. He was of inestimable service to Father Montigny, since the latter had not yet mastered the Indian language. Father Bineteau died while at the Tamaroa mission on December 25, 1699.

6. Luke Callet, O.F.M.

Father Luke Callet was born at Besançon in France on November 4, 1715; he entered the Franciscan Order (probably in Canada) in 1750, and was ordained at Quebec in 1753. After being active in the Lake Erie region from 1753 to 1760, he came to the Illinois country in 1761 and during the next four years his name appears on the parish registers of Fort Chartres, St. Philippe, Kaskaskia, and Cahokia. In 1764 (when Hippolytus Collet left for Canada) he became Pastor of St. Anne at Fort Chartres. He died at Fort Chartres on September 5, 1765, and his remains were transferred from Fort Chartres to Prairie du Rocher on May 24, 1768.

7. Hippolytus Collet, O.F.M.

Father Hippolytus Collet was born at Paris in France on October 5, 1692; he entered the Franciscan Order in 1715, and came to Canada in 1737. After twenty-two years of activity in Canada, 1737-1759, he came to Fort Chartres, where he labored for five years, 1759-1764; then he returned to Canada. He apparently never was active at Kaskaskia, for his name does not appear in any of the Kaskaskia Parish Registers, but he is mentioned here to distinguish him from Luke Callet, with whom he is often confused.

8. Matthew Condamine, diocesan priest

Nothing is known about the life of Father Matthew Condamine except that he was active as Pastor of Kaskaskia during a three-year period, 1832-1835.

9. Francis Xavier Dahmen, C.M.

Father Francis Dahmen was born at Duern on the Rhine in 1789. He served as a soldier under Napoleon Bonaparte; thereupon he joined the Vincentian Fathers, came to America (while still a Seminarian) and was ordained in 1819. He acted as Pastor of Vincennes from 1820 to 1821, then as Pastor of Ste. Genevieve from 1822 to 1840. During this time he also visited Kaskaskia, for his name appears in the Kaskaskia Marriage Register in 1825. From 1840 to 1852 he taught at the Seminary, and in 1852 he returned to France, where he died in 1866.

10. Pierre Desmoulins, diocesan priest

Father Pierre Desmoulins came to America as a Cleric in 1817; he was ordained to the priesthood in 1818. He acted as Pastor of Kaskaskia from 1818 to 1825. Later we find him as Pastor of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The date and place of his death are not known.

11. Benedict Joseph Flaget, S.S.

Father Benedict Flaget was born at Contournat in France on December 7, 1763; he joined the Congregation of St. Sulpice on November 1, 1783, and was ordained priest in 1787. The French Revolution drove him to America, where Bishop Carroll sent him to the Illinois country in 1792. He served as Pastor of Vincennes from 1792 to 1795. He also visited Kaskaskia, for his name appears in the Marriage Register of Kaskaskia in 1795. In 1808 he was appointed Bishop of Bardstown, Kentucky. He was consecrated by Bishop Carroll on November 4, 1810. In 1839 he transferred the Episcopal See from Bardstown to Louisville. He died at Louisville on February 11, 1850.

12. François Forget du Verger, Seminary Priest

Father François Forget was born in France, but the date of his birth is not known. Nor is it known when he joined the Seminary of Foreign Missions. He was in charge of Cahokia from 1754 to 1763. During this time he also visited Kaskaskia, for his name appears in the Kaskaskia Marriage Register in 1758. In November 1763 he sold the mission property at Cahokia and departed for New Orleans, whence he left for France in 1764. The date of his death is not known.

13. Joseph Julien Fourré, S.J.

Father Joseph Fourré was born in France on January 6, 1703; he entered the Jesuit Order on November 26, 1721, and came to Louisiana in 1747. He was shortly sent to the Illinois country, for his name appears on the Kaskaskia Marriage Register in 1749. He died on February 19, 1759, while on his return trip to France.

14. J. Gagnon, Seminary Priest

Father J. Gagnon was born in France, but the date of his birth is not known. Nor is it known when he came to Canada. In 1730 he was sent from Quebec to the Illinois country, where he was pastor of Fort Chartres from May 1730 to November 1731. He was active in Kaskaskia in 1748-1749. The date of his death is not known, but he died at Fort Chartres, and on May 24, 1768, his remains were transferred from Fort Chartres to Prairie du Rocher.

15. Pierre Gibault, diocesan priest

Father Pierre Gibault was born in Canada on April 7, 1737. He was ordained priest at Quebec on March 19, 1768. For twenty-five years (1768-1793) he was active in the entire Illinois mission: Kaskaskia, Prairie du Rocher, Ste. Gene-

vieve, Cahokia, Vincennes, and even St. Louis. His efforts in winning over the French populace of Kaskaskia and of Vincennes to the American cause won for him the epithet of "the Patriot priest". His headquarters were at Kaskaskia from 1768 to 1785, at Vincennes from 1785 to 1789, at Cahokia from 1789 to 1793. In 1793, when Bishop Carroll of Baltimore had sufficient priests to care for all the posts east of the Mississippi, Father Gibault became Pastor of New Madrid in Missouri from 1793 to 1802. He died either in 1802 at New Madrid or in 1804 in Canada.

16. Jacques Gravier, S.J.

Father Jacques Gravier was born at Moulins in France on May 17, 1651; he entered the Jesuit Order on October 29, 1670, and came to Canada in 1685. In 1688 he succeeded Father Allouez as Pastor of the Kaskaskia mission and, with the exception of three years (1696-1699) when he was Superior of all the Ottawa missions, he remained in charge of the Kaskaskia mission till 1705, taking part in all its migrations: to Peoria in 1691, to Des Peres River in 1700, to the Kaskaskia River in 1703. Seriously wounded by an arrow, he went for medical treatment to Mobile in 1706 and thence to Paris. In February, 1708, he returned to America; but he died soon afterwards, on April 26, 1708.

17. Alexander Xavier Guyenne, S.J.

Father Alexander Guyenne was born at Orleans in France on December 29, 1696; he entered the Jesuit Order on September 24, 1713. He came to Louisiana in 1727, being one of the companions of Father Beaubois. He labored among the Alabamas till 1730, then among the Arkansas tribes. From 1748 to 1762 he was active in the Illinois mission, being Superior of all the Illinois missions for seven years, 1749-1756. He was for some time Pastor of Fort Chartres, and his name appears in the Kaskaskia Marriage Register in 1748. He died in the Illinois mission in 1762.

18. Jean Charles Guymonneau, S.J.

Father Jean Guymonneau was born in France on March 14, 1684; he entered the Jesuit Order on October 3, 1704, and arrived in Canada in 1715. He was active in the Illinois country for twenty years, 1716-1736. His name appears in the Kaskaskia Baptismal Register in 1720. He died in the Illinois mission on February 6, 1736.

19. Pierre Janin, diocesan priest

Father Pierre Janin was sent by Bishop Carroll of Baltimore to the Illinois country in 1795. He acted as Pastor of Kaskaskia from 1795 to 1796.

He received a government commission as "Missionary of the Indians" at \$200 a year. But after a year, he resigned this government commission, left Kaskaskia and crossed over to the Spanish side of the Mississippi. After a few months at St. Louis, he became Pastor of the Post of Arkansas, where he was active for three years, 1796-1799. The time and place of his death are not known.

20. Joseph François Kereben, S.J.

Father Joseph Kereben was born in France on December 29, 1683; he entered the Jesuit Order on August 27, 1703, and came to Canada in 1716. When Louisiana was separated from Canada, Father Kereben became the first Superior of Louisiana (New Orleans), 1723-1725. He died on February 2, 1728, in the Illinois mission, but his name does not appear on any parish records of Kaskaskia.

21. Placide de La Coudray

Nothing is known about Father Placide de La Coudray except the fact that he signed his name in the Kaskaskia Marriage Register in 1773.

22. Nicolas Laurent, Seminary Priest

Father Nicolas Laurent was sent from Paris (via Quebec) to Cahokia in 1739. His name appears in the Kaskaskia Marriage Register in 1744.

23. Pierre Huet de La Valinière, S.S.

Father Pierre de La Valinière was born at Varade in France on January 10, 1732. He came to Canada as a Sulpician Cleric and was ordained at Quebec on June 15, 1755. He was active in Canada till 1779, when he was forced to leave Canada because he sympathized with the American Colonies. He was accepted by Bishop Carroll of Baltimore and sent to Kaskaskia as Vicar General of the Illinois missions in 1786. As Vicar General, Father La Valinière had only two priests under him: Gibault at Vincennes and St. Pierre at Cahokia. In 1789, Father La Valinière left for New Orleans; and the following year we find him at St. Sulpice in Montreal. Date and place of his death are not known.

24. Jean Antoine Le Boulenger, S.J.

Father Jean Le Boulenger was born at Rouen in France on July 22, 1685; he entered the Jesuit Order in 1700, and came to Canada in 1716. He was active at Kaskaskia from 1719 to 1729, -- perhaps till 1740. He usually signed himself in the Kaskaskia Baptismal Register as "Aumonier des Troupes" ("Chaplain of the Troops"), probably because his army-pay was a more dependable source of support than his salary as Pastor. He died at Kaskaskia on November 4, 1740.

25. Father Le Dru, O.P.

Nothing is known about the birth and early life of Father Le Dru, a Dominican. He was sent by Bishop Carroll to Cahokia in 1789, but shortly afterwards crossed over to the west (Spanish) side of the Mississippi, where he acted as Pastor of St. Louis from 1789 to 1793. His name appears in the Kaskaskia Marriage Register in 1789. Father Le Dru was also active at St. Charles and at St. Ferdinand in Missouri. The date and place of his death are not known.

26. Michael Levadoux, S.S.

Father Michael Levadoux was born at Clermont in France on April 1, 1746; he joined the Sulpicians in 1773. He was Director of the Seminary at Limoges from 1774 to 1791. Driven out of France by the French Revolution, he came to Baltimore in 1792, and was sent by Bishop Carroll to the Illinois country. As Pastor of Cahokia from 1792 to 1796, he began the construction of the church in Cahokia which is still standing today. His name appears in the Kaskaskia Baptismal Register in 1792. In 1796, Father Levadoux was transferred to Detroit; in 1801 he returned to Baltimore, and in 1803 he was recalled to France. He died at Le-Fuy-en-Velay in France on January 13, 1815.

27. Bernard de Limpach, O.F.M.Cap.

Nothing is known about the birth and early life of Father Bernard de Limpach, a Capuchin. He acted as Pastor of St. Louis from 1776 to 1789. His name appears in the Kaskaskia Marriage Register in 1783. The date and place of his death are not known.

28. Pierre Gabriel Marest, S.J.

Father Pierre Marest was born at Laval in France on October 14, 1662; he entered the Jesuit Order on October 1, 1681, and came to Canada in 1694. He was active in the Kaskaskia mission from 1698 to 1714. In 1707, his mission (on the Kaskaskia River) numbered 2200 souls, all of whom -- except 40 or 50 -- were Christians. Father Marest died at Kaskaskia on September 15, 1714.

29. Jacques Marquette, S.J.

Jacques Marquette was born at Laon in France on June 1, 1637; he entered the Jesuit Order on October 7, 1654, and came to Canada in 1666. He spent two years, 1666-1668, at Three Rivers learning Indian languages. He was sent to Sault Ste. Marie in 1668, to Mission St. Esprit in 1669, and came back to St. Ignace (at Mackinac) in 1671. He accompanied the Jolliet exploring expedition down

the Mississippi River in 1673, and on the return trip (up the Illinois River) spent three days (in late August or early September) at the Kaskaskia Mission which had been founded by Father Allouez about two months previously. He is claimed to have returned to Kaskaskia Mission in the spring of 1675, but remained there only six days (April 9 to April 15). While on his way to seek medical attention at Mackinac, he died on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, at the present site of Ludington, Michigan, on May 19, 1675.

30. Jean Mermet, S.J.

Father Jean Mermet was born at Grenoble in France on September 23, 1664; he entered the Jesuit Order on November 26, 1683, and came to Canada in 1698. For four years, 1698-1702, he labored among the Miami Indians on St. Joseph River (in present Michigan); next we find him at the Charles Juchereau Tannery on the Ohio River some eight or ten miles above the present site of Cairo, Illinois, where he served as Chaplain for the French and as Missionary for a band of Mascouten Indians in the vicinity from 1702 to 1704. When the Juchereau Tannery was abandoned, Father Mermet came to Kaskaskia and was active there from 1705 to 1716. He died at Kaskaskia on September 15, 1716.

31. Sebastien Louis Meurin, S.J.

Father Sebastien Meurin was born at Charleville in France on December 26, 1707; he entered the Jesuit Order on September 18, 1729, and came to Louisiana in November, 1741. He was active in the Illinois mission, mainly at Kaskaskia (especially Indian Kaskaskia), from 1742 to 1763. When the Jesuits were expelled in 1763, Father Meurin went as far as New Orleans; but before he embarked for France, he obtained permission to return to the Illinois country on condition that he would function as a diocesan priest and not as a Jesuit. In 1764, Father Meurin became Pastor of Ste. Genevieve, but also attended to Kaskaskia, Prairie du Rocher, Cahokia, and St. Louis. In 1767 he was appointed Vicar General of the Illinois country, whereupon the Spaniards, distrustful of his "Jesuit" influence, forced him to leave Ste. Genevieve. He withdrew to Cahokia until Father Gibault arrived as Vicar General in 1768. Father Meurin spent his last years at Prairie du Rocher, where he died on August 13, 1777. On August 23, 1849, his remains were removed to the Jesuit St. Stanislaus Novitiate in Florissant, Missouri. And so Father Meurin, who was willing to forego the Jesuit life for the good of his Indians, found a final resting place among his fellow-Jesuits.

32. Donatien Olivier, diocesan priest

Nothing is known about the birth and early life of Father Donatien Olivier. He served as Pastor of Kaskaskia from 1799 to 1817, and then as Pastor of Prairie du Rocher from 1817 to 1827. Thereupon he retired to the Seminary at the Barrens (Perryville, Missouri), where he died on January 29, 1841, at the age of ninety-two years.

33. Victor Paillasson, diocesan priest

Nothing is known about the birth and early life of Father Victor Paillasson. He acted as Pastor of Kaskaskia from 1830 to 1832, then as Pastor of New Madrid from 1832 to 1836. In 1836 he joined the Jesuits. Date and place of his death are not known.

34. Louis Payet, Seminary Priest

Nothing is known about Father Louis Payet except that he came from Canada to Vincennes in 1784 and then was active at Kaskaskia from 1784 to 1787.

35. François Pinet, S.J.

Father François Pinet was born at Limoges in France on December 11, 1661; he entered the Jesuit Order on August 29, 1682, and came to Canada in

1694. In 1696 he founded Guardian Angel Mission for two tribes of Miami Indians at the present site of Chicago. In 1698 he proceeded to Tamaroa, where he assisted the Seminary Priests Father Montigny and Father Bergier till 1702. In July 1702, Father Pinet left Tamaroa and crossed the Mississippi River to the Kaskaskia mission on the Des Peres River. He died there only a few weeks later, on August 1, 1702.

36. Sebastien Rasle, S.J.

Father Sebastien Rasle was born at Pontarlier in France on January 4, 1657; he entered the Jesuit Order on September 24, 1675, and arrived in Canada on October 13, 1689. He was active in the Kaskaskia mission at Peoria from 1692 to 1693. After his return to Quebec, he was assigned to the missions in Acadia and Maine (Abenaki Indians), where he labored successfully for many years. He was killed by New England troops, August 23, 1724.

37. Gabriel Richard, S.S.

Father Gabriel Richard was born at Saintes in France on October 15, 1767. He was ordained priest in October, 1791. He was among the group of Sulpicians who at the time of the French Revolution came to Baltimore in 1791-1792. Bishop Carroll at once sent him to the Illinois country,

where he served as Pastor of Kaskaskia from 1792 to 1795, and as Pastor of Prairie du Rocher from 1796 to 1798. In 1798 he was transferred to Detroit. In 1809 he founded the "Michigan Essay or Impartial Observer", the first paper published in Michigan and the first Catholic paper in the United States. In 1817 he was one of the founders of the University of Michigan. In 1823 he was elected to Congress (House of Representatives). In 1832 a cholera epidemic ravaged Detroit and claimed Father Gabriel Richard as one of its victims on September 13, 1832.

38. Paul de St. Pierre, O.Carm.

Father Paul de St. Pierre was born in France in 1745. He came to America as Chaplain in the French army under Rochambeau which fought on the side of the American Colonies in the Revolutionary War. After the Revolutionary War ended, Father St. Pierre remained in America. In 1785, Bishop Carroll sent him to the Illinois country, where he was active at Cahokia from 1785 to 1789 and at Ste. Genevieve from 1789 to 1797. During this time he also visited Kaskaskia on several occasions (1785, 1789, 1792). In 1797, Father St. Pierre left Ste. Genevieve and went probably to New Orleans. From 1804 to 1826, he was Pastor of Iberville, Louisiana, where he died October 15, 1826.

39. J. Tanion, C.M.

Nothing is recorded about the Vincentian Father J. Tanion except that he was at Kaskaskia in 1827. His name appears in the Kaskaskia Marriage Register in 1827.

40. René Tartarin, S.J.

Father René Tartarin was born in France on January 22, 1695; he entered the Jesuit Order on August 20, 1712. He came to Louisiana in 1727, being one of the seven missionaries brought back from France by Father Beaubois. Father Tartarin was active at Kaskaskia from 1727 to 1730, and we again find him at Kaskaskia in 1741. He died in the Louisiana missions on September 24, 1745.

41. Father Valentine, O.F.M.Cap.

Nothing is known about the birth and early life of the Capuchin Father Valentine. He came from New Orleans to St. Louis in 1772 and became the first resident Pastor of St. Louis from May 1772 to June 1775. During this time he visited Kaskaskia, for we find his name in the Kaskaskia Marriage Register in 1773. In June, 1775, Father Valentine returned to New Orleans. He was active at Cote des Allemands and at Iberville from 1778 to 1781. Date and place of death are not known.

42. Pierre Vergamin, C.M.

Nothing is known about the birth and early life of the Vincentian Father Pierre Vergamin. He came to America as a Seminarian and was ordained to the priesthood in 1826. In 1827, his name appears in the Kaskaskia Marriage Register.

43. Jean Marie de Ville, S.J.

Father Jean de Ville was born at Auxerre in France on September 8, 1672; he entered the Jesuit Order on September 9, 1693, and came to Canada in 1706. He was active at Kaskaskia in 1711, then at Peoria (Peoria Indians) from 1712 to 1714, and again at Kaskaskia from 1714 to 1719. In 1719 he went to Mobile to complain personally to Governor Bienville about the lawlessness of some French traders. On the return trip (in the fall of 1719) he was overtaken by illness and had to halt at Natchez. He died at Natchez on June 15, 1720.

44. Louis Vivier, S.J.

Father Louis Vivier was born at Issoudun in France on October 6, 1714; he entered the Jesuit Order on September 12, 1731, and came to Louisiana in 1749. He was active at Kaskaskia from 1749 to 1753, and at Vincennes from 1753 to 1756. He died at Vincennes on October 2, 1756.

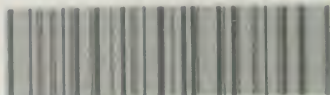
45. Philibert Watrin, S.J.

Father Philibert Watrin was born at Metz in France on April 1, 1697; he entered the Jesuit Order on November 6, 1712, and came to Louisiana in 1732. He was active at Kaskaskia in 1746 and again from 1759 to 1763. When the Jesuits were expelled, he returned to France on February 6, 1764. He died in France on January 30, 1771.

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